

Comments pertaining to the Farm Bill to USDA Undersecretary Mark Rey

**August 18, 2005
Douglas, Wyoming**

I am Tim Pexton, 3rd generation rancher with lands south of Douglas at the northern edge of the Medicine Bow National Forest. My ranch includes approximately 2,000 acres of forested land. Today I would like to address some forestry issues as they relate to the Farm Bill.

As you know, the old SIP and FIP programs were phased out in the late 80's, I believe. They were both specific to management assistance on private forested lands. In 1992, SIP and FIP were replaced by FLEP, a very good program which was, again, designed to assist private landowners manage their forests. The problem is the Forest Service has been borrowing from the FLEP account to cover fire suppression costs over the last several years. In fact, cost share funds that were available under SIP and FIP have been reduced by as much as 80% today in Wyoming under FLEP.

With this reduction in funding, we have been encouraged to utilize other Farm Bill programs such as the NRCS's EQUIP program. Although it does allow for the funding of forestry related practices, it is seldom utilized for this due to limited funds and the prioritization of other water quality related practices. Water quality is of high concern to us, as it should be. Forested lands provide water for many Wyoming communities and are the headwaters for many of the major rivers of the US. As such, these forests, both private and Federal, serve as the initial resource to protect water quality. So it would seem to make sense that we raise the priority of funding for the management of these forests.

A lack of management has contributed to the forest health concerns in Wyoming (such as, Mountain Pine Beetle, Douglas Fir Beetle, White Pine blister rust, etc.). Timber stand improvement practices can serve to address these issues. However, these practices are very expensive and require long periods of time before a return on investment is realized, if ever. To that end, the search for and the development of alternative markets for the biomass that is produced by forest management practices at least needs to continue, and ideally can be expanded.

I'm impressed with the Stewardship Contracts that the Forest Service and BLM have begun to use and I think the program would be beneficial to private landowners as well. Perhaps tax credits and other incentives should be used to help with all these issues.

As is the case with the rest of the nation, we are facing changing landowner demographics and forest fragmentation issues. Landowner education is extremely important and is a key factor in increasing forest management practices that meet the public's demand of our forests. To that end, extension programs should be strengthened to provide direct technical assistance.

I believe we need the Farm Bill to endorse the idea that private forested landowners can provide clean water, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystem

services if their forests are managed accordingly. Perhaps the Forest Service could study this concept, educate others and incorporate it in their plans for private forested lands.

In closing, I believe there is a need for stable and adequate funding to assist non-industrial private forested landowners with the management practices that will be beneficial to society as a whole while addressing concerns related to the potential for catastrophic wildland fire and insect and disease occurrence in the nation's forests.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my views on this subject.

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